



To what extent is critical thinking affected by language demands on a level seven degree course?

Key areas: critical thinking, Language support, graduate employability

Kirby and Goodpaster, 1999

“We think with words. As we read this we are using language to think. Language is very important to how we achieve critical thinking.”



Content Style 2

Examples of critical thinking/communication in the automotive trade in action

- **Deductive skills and communication around a problem/problems**
- **Discussing a problem with a customer, empathising, explaining a job clearly**
- **Analysing given information from a customer, comparing with noticeable symptoms (sight, sound, smell etc) and also with technical knowledge**
- **Diagnosing, coming up with a plan, citing it, explaining remedial action**

Key skills

Communication skills are often cited as the number one factor in graduate employability



Context: Level 7 Industry Project– degree level

- 25 students – 23 of them non-native speakers
- 2 native speakers
- One lecturer native speaker, 3 non-native speakers
- Students write a 40,000 word thesis
- Students give assessed power-point presentations

Sample errors

- Air pollution contribute by vehicles
- I was out of my expect for this result
- The following is a report concussion
- More oversea trade
- Before I start test I need stabilising
- Beijing is very crowed
- The demotic driving history of China is much shorter compare to develop country

Focus group questions

1. On a scale of 1 – 5 how do you rate your writing skills?
2. Where do you go for help with your writing when you need it?
3. Does your tutor help you with writing in relation to your critical thinking?
4. Do you have any other concerns with writing on this course?

Responses

- A host of language related issues: insecurity of writing in a language which is not their mother tongue. Two quotes show this:
- “I am worry about by using wrong grammar will affect my score”
- “Grammar not good might be a concern”
- The word count also a source of anxiety
- Some wanted more teacher guidance on writing
- Concern that language would have an impact on assessment

Conclusions

- Thinking per se may not be affected if a learner's first language is not English, although cultural values around *critical thinking* may have a role to play;
- Language can and does have an impact on *perceptions* of thinking;
- The perceptions may vary, depending on the listener – *some* will not put up with grammar errors for example – if communication is effective;
- Language can impact on expression of thinking, and hence affect clarity of the message;
- Some listeners/readers (audiences) may have a low tolerance viz language
- Language does need some attention on vocational courses

Study by Ross (2009)

Employers favour some graduates over others:

61% of international students able to find work

87% success for domestic students

Mainland Chinese as low as 49%

2020 workforce

“As we negotiate the human/machine division of labour in the next decade, critical thinking or sense making will emerge as a skill workers increasingly need to capitalise on.” (Davies, A. et al 2011 Future Work Skills)

It is hard to see that working without language.